United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

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Plant a Tree for the Bicentennial of the Constitution

Why Plant a Tree?

Many trees that sprouted or were planted at the time of the signing of the Constitution are still alive today. Thus a good way to commemorate the Bicentennial of the Constitution is to plant a tree. Trees can improve your environment today, and many of them will still be living when our descendants celebrate the Tricentennial of the Constitution in 2087.

A tree can add beauty to your home and neighborhood. Remember, you step out of your house into whatever environment you have created. Beauty is contagious; if you plant trees around your home, your neighbors may do the same. And, trees can help increase the value of your property, sometimes by 10 to 20 percent.

A tree can be a natural air conditioner. The evaporation from a single large tree can produce the cooling effect of 10 roomsize air conditioners operating 20 hours a day. Healthy and properly pruned trees are wonderful for shading your roof and keeping your house cool. You can even improve the efficiency of your mechanical air conditioner by shading it with a tree and thus keeping it out of direct sunlight.

A tree can bring music into your life. Certain trees attract birds and animals. Not only will you enjoy new wildlife friends, but they can help control insects.

A tree serves as a buffer against unpleasant noises. If well placed, a tree can reduce noise by as much as 40 percent.

In a forest, a person is usually surrounded by pleasant smells. Certain trees can help freshen the atmosphere with the trees' own natural, pleasant fragrances. For example, one cherry tree can perfume the air with 200,000 flowers, and their beauty can be breathtaking.

Tree leaves can also break the onslaught of raindrops pelting the soil surface and give the soil a chance to soak up as much water as possible. Fallen tree leaves cover the ground and help keep the soil from drying out. They also reduce the temperature of the soil. And, decaying leaves enrich the soil and support new tree growth.

A tree can even help clean the air. Because of smog, some urban areas now receive up to 16 percent less sunlight than they did in 1920. Trees are so good at trapping dust that some cities have to "wash" their freeway tree plantings every so often. In one large American city, the dust level in the air on the sheltered side of planted areas was 75 percent lower than the dust level on the windward side.

Where Should You Plant Your Tree?

In Your Yard

A front yard is a feature spot of your home. It is an outstanding place for that special tree. A front yard tree should complement your neighbors' present landscaping and your own. Plan it to highlight your home and increase its value. A backyard tree can be functional in a different way. Choose it to shade a picnic area or a patio, as well as your house.

On An Apartment Balcony

Planting a tree in a tub or container on an apartment balcony, especially by a glass door or large window, can visually extend your inside room to the outside. The tree's relaxing shape and the shadows it casts can soften the straight lines and shadows of other nearby buildings. Its blossoms and seasonal splashes of color can remind you of happy times in the forest.

Indoors

Certain trees can be grown indoors in a tub or container to bring back memories of that special forest vacation.

In Front Of Ugly Spots Outdoors

Every area has some ugly spots to hide. Quick-growing trees can quickly hide an unsightly area and soon turn it into a green area. Consider bushy evergreens for this purpose.

In Your Neighborhood Or Community

Get together with your neighbors or have your civic association work with your public works or parks department and make tree-lined streets and highways a reality. This will enhance property values in your area and make your drive downtown or to work more pleasureable.

How Should You Select Your Tree?

You have a wide range of choices because there are many different kinds of trees. First, you should consider how much space you have and what the final purpose of the tree will be. With these considerations in mind, you may then choose your tree for the beauty of its blossoms or form, or you may choose it for the fruit or nuts it will bear. You may want a tree that will provide food or shelter for wildlife, or you may want one that will stop erosion. You may select one that will remain small or one that will grow rapidly to give shade or protection from the wind. Remember each species of tree prefers a certain climate and special soil, moisture, and sun or shade conditions.

Your cooperative extension agent (listed in the white pages of the telephone book under your county government), public forester, landscape architect, or nursery garden center can help you choose the right tree or trees for your purpose and for your climate and soil. These people can also advise you on where you can get a tree to plant.

Twenty Questions You Might Ask When Buying A Tree

1. Does the tree need full sun, partial shade, or complete shade?
2. Will the tree withstand cold and hot weather?
3. Is the tree especially susceptible to diseases or to damage by insects?
4. Does it need acid soil or sweet soil?

5. How can I make acid soil sweet and vice versa?
6. Does it need a dry area or a wet area?
7. How big will the tree grow and how fast?
8. Should it be planted close to a building or to other trees, or does it need open space?
9. Can I plant flowers under the tree?
10. Does it need special care the first few years?
11. Will it produce nuts, fruit, cones, or colorful leaves or flowers that I can use?
12. Will it give good shade in summer and winter?
13. Is the tree more smog resistant than other trees? Be sure to find out if you are planting along a major highway.
14. How far should I plant it from a sewer or drain line, sidewalk, or driveway?
15. Does it have shallow or deep roots and how well will it withstand wind?
16. Can it serve as a windbreak, noise barrier, or visual screen?
17. Will it encourage wildlife and birds to live in the area?
18. Will it drop many seeds in the area, causing a crop of sprouts come spring?
19. Is it noted for shedding leaves year round?
20. Will it fit in well with the area's landscaping?

How Should You Plant Your Tree?

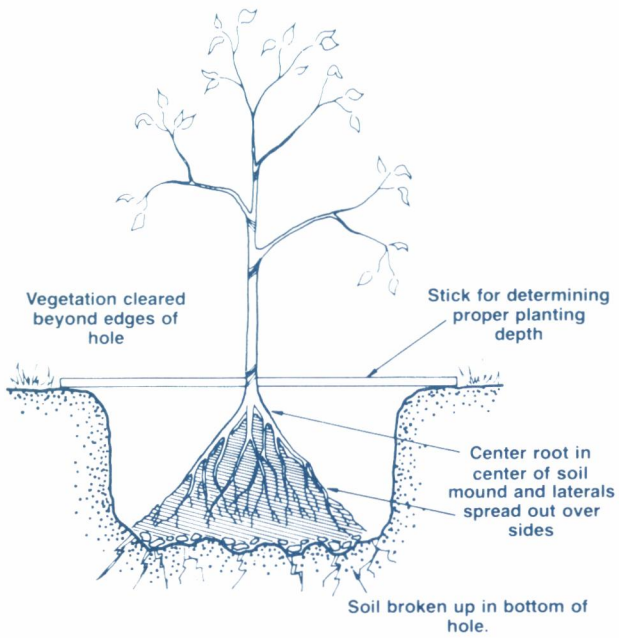
Bare-root Seedlings

If you want to start your tree or trees from seedlings, get good healthy plants and be sure to keep their roots moist until you put them in the ground.

Make a planting hole with a trowel or shovel. The planting hole should be about 2 feet wider and 6 inches deeper than the root mass of the tree. Save the soil you remove and mix it with peatmoss, compost, or other organic matter. (Unless you have heavy clay soil, which requires more organic matter, mix in about one shovelful of organic matter with one of soil.) Also, break up the soil at the bottom of the hole so roots can penetrate more easily.

Put enough of the prepared soil mixture into the bottom of the hole to raise the root mass so the tree will be at the same depth as or slightly higher than it was in the soil in the nursery. A straight stick or tool handle placed across the top of the hole will make it easy to find the right depth. Look for a distinct color change in the bark just above the roots. This color change marks the former soil level.

Before placing your tree in the planting hole, cut off broken or damaged roots just inside the break. Then put the central root straight down through the middle of the mound of soil in the hole, and carefully arrange the lateral roots so they are naturally spread out over the mound. Then fill in with about two-thirds of the prepared soil mixture, carefully distributing it around the roots. Thoroughly soak the soil to eliminate air pockets and get complete contact between soil and roots. When the water has drained away, fill in with the rest of the soil and water again.


Vegetation cleared beyond edges of hole
Stick for determining proper planting depth
Center root in center of soil mound and laterals spread out over sides
Soil broken up in bottom of hole.

Planting method for bare-root tree.

Containerized and Root-Wrapped Trees

If you want to begin with a tree larger than a bare-root seedling, you can get one that is growing in a container or one that has a root ball wrapped in plastic or burlap.

Follow the same procedure in preparing the hole as you would for a bare-root seedling. If the root ball is wrapped in plastic, remove the plastic after the tree is placed in the hole. If the tree is wrapped in burlap, loosen the burlap when you place the tree in the hole and either remove it or at least cut it away from the sides of the ball. If the tree is container-grown, carefully remove the container without disturbing the mass of soil and root. If the container is tapered or has fluted sides, you can probably loosen it by setting the container on its side and tapping the rim sharply several times. The root mass should then slide out easily. If not, or if the container has straight sides, you will have to cut it apart. Using tin snips for cans or plastic pots, make two cuts down

opposite sides. Large containers may need three or four cuts. Be very careful with cut cans because the edges are sharp and can inflict a serious cut.

When handling the tree, always support the root mass with a hand beneath it or holding the container, not holding only the stem, because the weight of the root mass and growing medium may damage or break the stem or roots.

When you remove the container, you may find that the roots are spiraliing around the outside or bottom of the root mass. If so, carefully tease them out and spread them in the planting hole, or cut them back if they are too entangled to be separated. Otherwise they may continue their spiral growth instead of spreading out into the surrounding soil.

Once the tree is out of the container, place it on the soil mound in the planting hole, fill the planting hole about half full of soil, and water well. Then pack the soil firmly around the root mass to make sure there are no air pockets, but don't compact it so hard that air and water can't reach the roots. Then fill in with the rest of the soil mixture and water well.

How Should You Care For Your Tree?

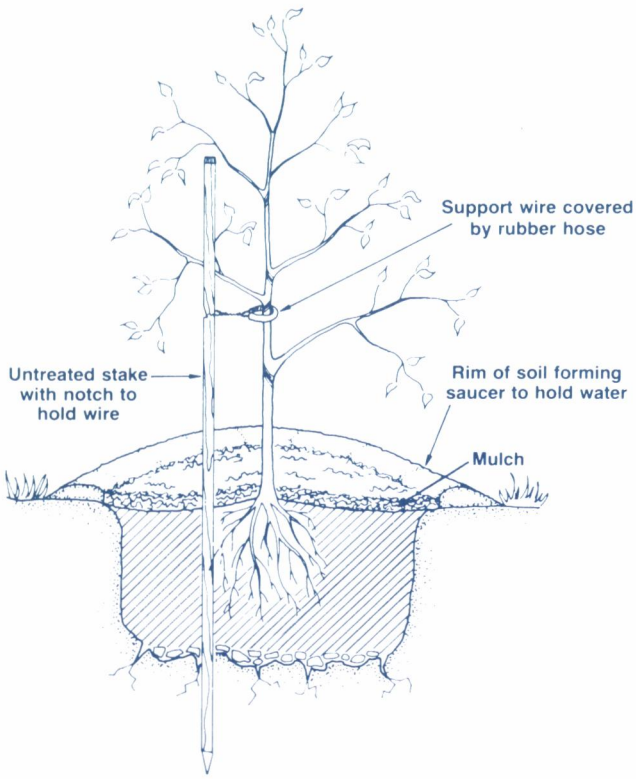
Getting It Off To a Good Start

Immediately after planting your tree, you should build up a rim of soil around the edge of the planting hole to form a saucer-shaped watering basin. When you water your tree, flood this basin slowly so the water gradually saturates the root zone.

You probably should stake your tree for support and protection. For small trees, a single stake on the windward side of the tree is usually enough. Thread the wire around the tree stem through a section of garden hose so that it will not damage the bark. Or, you can use a strip of cloth. At the stake, place the wire or cloth in a notch or otherwise fasten it so it will not slide down the stem. The stake should not be treated with preservatives if it is driven into the ground close to the tree's roots, because the chemicals may injure the roots. Instead, use either a stake made from naturally durable wood or a length of pipe.

For trees taller than about 3 feet, more than one stake may be needed. A convenient system is to use three stakes spaced equally around the tree. Adjust the support wires so that the tree stem is held upright and tension is equal on all three sides. Remember that trees should not be staked so tightly that they cannot flex at all in the wind. Inspect the hose-enclosed wires several times a year to make sure the stem has not grown too large for the loops. Staking should be continued until the root system is well established and the trunk is strong enough to hold the crown erect.

If your soil is low in nutrients, you may need to fertilize your tree sometime after it is planted. Ask your county agent, forester, horticulturist, or nursery for help in determining what your soil needs and how to supply it. Trees may need protection from wind, sun, cold, insects, disease, animals, or pollution during their early years, and these same professionals can advise about what to do should such problems arise.


Support wire covered by rubber hose
Untreated stake with notch to hold wire
Rim of soil forming saucer to hold water
Mulch

A tree correctly planted.

Organizations arranging for trees to be planted along city streets, highways, boulevards, city squares, or parks should also arrange for their care after planting.

Improving It As It Grows

You can improve on nature. Pruning can make some trees more suitable for your purposes. How to prune will depend on the type of tree and its purpose. For example, pruning can improve the form of certain ornamentals. It can strengthen fruit trees and help them produce larger fruit.

Inspect your shade trees regularly and prune them when needed. Remove dead, diseased, or unsightly parts. You should also remove sprouts growing at or near the base of the tree trunk, branches that grow toward the center of the tree, and crossed branches. If your tree has a *V* crotch, you should remove one of the members forming the *V*, if you can do so without ruining the appearance of the tree.

Do not leave stubs when you prune. Stubs usually die, and become doors through which decay can enter. But if you need to

remove an old stub, be careful to prune where a natural callus ridge has formed. Otherwise, you can create a new wound.

Nature may not always produce the perfect tree, but you can help it along by pruning.

Planting a Constitution tree and caring for it are really easy to do. The care you take will be well worth it. The tree will reward you many times with its beauty and shade.

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